

THE GROWING POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN  
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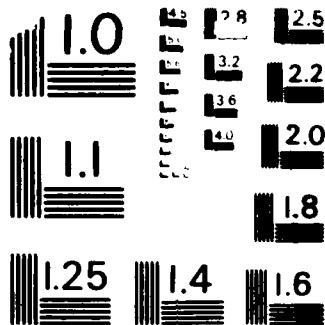
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## RESEARCH REPORT

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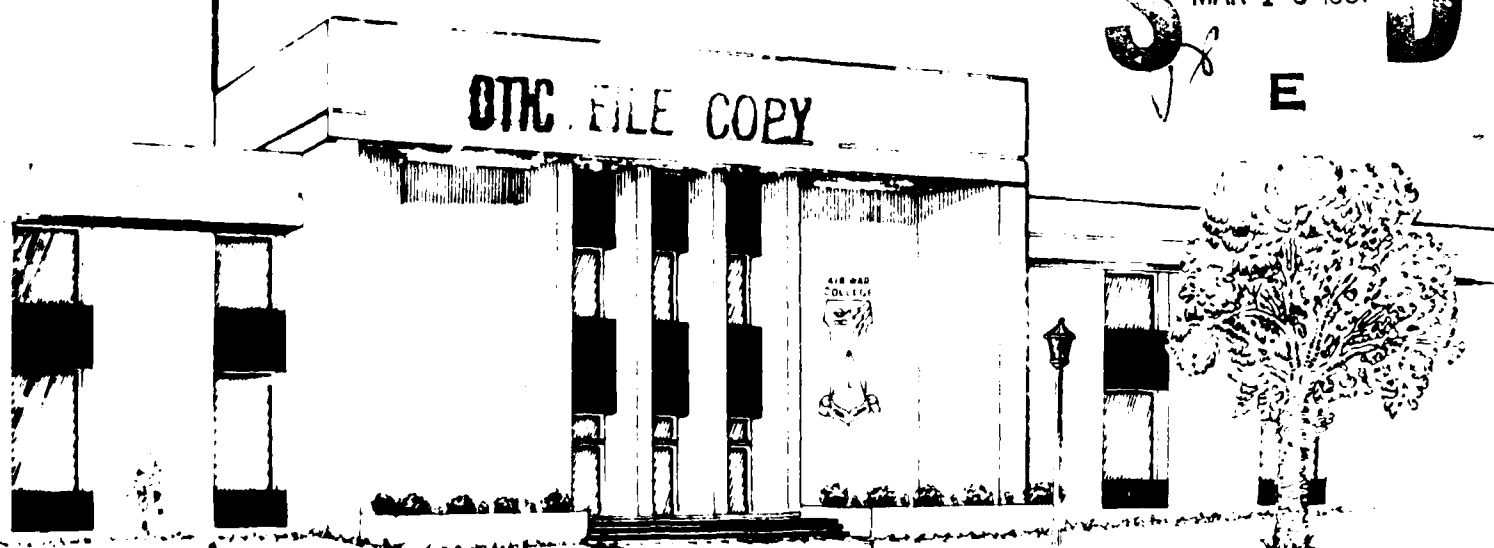
THE GROWING POLITICAL INFLUENCE  
OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY

By COLONEL JAMES T. MURRAY

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THE GROWING POLITICAL INFLUENCE  
OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY

by

James T. Murray  
Colonel, USAF

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
IN  
FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH  
REQUIREMENT

Research Advisor: Dr. David Albright

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH REPORT ABSTRACT

TITLE: The Growing Political Influence of the South African Military

AUTHOR: James T. Murray, Colonel, USAF

Analysis of the role of the South African Defense Force in current political decision making. The rise of Afrikaner nationalism and its coinciding impact on the military is traced. The white South African society has become more militarized with the government's Total Onslaught/Total Strategy concept. As the military establishment has grown to counter the perceived threat, it has gained political influence to the extent some feel it is the dominant policy making institution in South Africa today. This role will probably continue for the near future.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Colonel James T. Murray (M.S. Southern Illinois University) formerly was the USAF Attache accredited to Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea. During his tour in Africa he traveled extensively and developed a rare political-military insight into African developments. His previous USAF assignments included pilot duties in airlift and refueling operations, and various operational staff assignments. He is a graduate of the Armed Forces Staff College and the Air War College, class of 1986.

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## THE GROWING POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MILITARY

In the past 25 years, South Africa has become increasingly militarized because of the numerous changes in the political atmosphere of Southern Africa. As a result, the South African Defence Force (SADF) has emerged as the region's dominant military power. It has been used increasingly in a campaign of intervention and destabilization against neighboring countries in an overall effort to project political, economic and military hegemony in the area.

The militarization of South African society was a result of many influences. Among them were the consolidation of Afrikaner nationalism, internal unrest, the 1976 Soweto riots, the collapse of friendly governments on the borders, the UN arms embargo, and decreased international support. This militarization became evident in major increases in defense spending and manpower, a broad mobilization of the population, development of a domestic arms industry and offensive use of military force to achieve political objectives.

As South Africa turned inward, the government devised an overall national strategy to counter what it perceived as an international conspiracy directed against it by the Soviet Union. This strategy served as an ideological framework to unite the white nation behind government

programs. Because of the obvious military role in such a strategy, the SADF became more involved in policy making. Whether it was invited in by the civilian leadership, or demanded an increased role, is the subject of current debate. However, as it expanded in size and capability, its influence in the areas of political and foreign policy also grew. Today, because of their positions in select government committees, SADF members have taken a leading role in policy formulation and execution. It can be argued that they are at the core of the formal and informal dimensions of all South African policy making and largely responsible for its momentum and direction. (1)

This trend of increased military emphasis and direction in South African politics will continue for the foreseeable future. As domestic issues cause further splits in the Afrikaner National Party political base, the military could become an increasingly important institution for stability. Knowledge of its current role will be necessary to understand future developments within the country.

This paper will trace the historic events that resulted in the growth of the SADF, as an arm of rising Afrikaner nationalism, through changing internal and external threats, to its position today as perhaps the most influential institution in the South African government.

#### HISTORIC DEFENSE POLICY AND ORGANIZATION

From the Union's formation in 1910 until 1962, when South Africa formally left the British Commonwealth, there

was no independent defense policy. Its military policy was closely tied to Western military strategy up through the 1950s. South African military units were part of the allied efforts in World Wars I and II, and Air Force units participated in the Berlin Airlift and the Korean War. It was only with the emergence of Africa's postwar independence movements, and continuance of South Africa's racial subjugation policies, that cooperation with the West declined. Events in Southern Africa during the 1960s eventually required development of a regionally oriented strategy.

The modern day SADF was formed in 1962 as a small force with outdated World War II equipment. Even with most of Africa then going through the disruption of independence, the Portuguese colonies and Rhodesia served as a buffer to any conventional threat. The only problem was one of insurgency from the military wings of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan African Congress (PAC). These two black independence movements had been active since 1950, but police successes had virtually nullified them by 1963.

This feeling of well being was insulated by South Africa's self image that it was an extension of the bastion of the West, due to its historic ties, mineral wealth and strategic geographic position. Even as late as 1973, South Africa pressed its image of cooperation with the West against worldwide communist aggression. Its military posture was described as primarily defensive. The government stated that even with the growing terrorist

threat in South Africa, it would fight whenever necessary, but any such action would be defensive.(2) Two years later, the SADF incursion into Angola voided this policy.

It is only during the past decade that South Africa has integrated its armed forces into the national policy process. The reason for this lies in the nation's unique European heritage. From 1795 to 1962 the South African military was under British influence. Even with-self government in 1910, the dominance of English-speaking officers kept the military functioning in a British framework. However, the Afrikaner never fully accepted the liberal English values of civilian control over the military.

The Afrikaner portion of the population has long had a tradition that small, volunteer, commando units should form the backbone of the nation's defense. When necessary, such as during the Boer War, the Afrikaner citizen-soldier belonged to a nation in arms. This belief has carried forward and somewhat eroded the concept of civilian control over the military. The Union Defense Force, founded in 1912, incorporated some of the mobile, flexible, free-wheeling style of the Boer commando. This heritage is an important aspect that must be understood when viewing civil-military attitudes today.

#### THE ROLE OF AFRIKANER NATIONALISM

Part of the reason for the increase of military influence can be traced to the vitality of Afrikaner

nationalism. Prior to the National Party's 1948 election victory, the Afrikaner had been at or near the bottom of the white social order. The National Party emerged as the vehicle of nationalism that had been organized earlier in the secret Broederbond society and mobilized into an Afrikaner populist appeal. After 1948, with the Afrikaner white majority in power, the English-speaking dominance of the social, economic, military and political order began to lessen. Whereas in 1948 Afrikaners owned only 9.6% of private business and held 16% of the professional posts, by 1976 these figures were 20.8% and 38% respectively.(3) By 1980, 60% of the government bureaucracy was Afrikaner, and the percentage was even greater at the higher levels.(4)

The rise of the National Party led to many social changes. Among them was the virtual "Afrikanerization" of the military. In the 1950s, early retirement was pressed for English-speaking officers, and requirements for dual-language (English-Afrikaans) capability further reduced the influence of the British-trained military.(5) By 1975, this purge was so complete that it was necessary to begin special recruitment of English speakers into the military.(6) This was needed to insure maximum mobilization of the white population. It also admitted the extent to which the Afrikaners dominated the military establishment.

Another reason for the increased role of the military in policy making was the rise of the current State President, P. W. Botha. He had been a member of Parliament

since the mid-1950s, and his previous posts included Minister of Information and Minister of Defense. Although he has no formal military background, he oversaw the tremendous growth of the SADF and the armaments industry in his 14 years as Defense Minister. During this time a mutually beneficial relationship formed between Botha and the defense establishment. It was reciprocal in that Botha was very successful in advancing SADF interests while relying heavily on its support and expertise.

In 1978, for example, the military openly backed Botha in his narrow Parliamentary election victory. The election was highlighted by the "Muldergate" scandal, where his major opponent, Cornelius Mulder, was charged with serious financial and administrative abuses. Mulder had been the Minister of Interior and Information, whose purview included the main security and intelligence functions under the Bureau of State Security (BOSS). The campaign also reflected past policy conflicts between Botha and Mulder concerning the military's role. Botha was a strong advocate that military power must be used to be credible.

After his election, Botha directed a major reorganization of the decentralized cabinet system, reducing the number of government departments from 43 to 4.(7) With this, he assured tighter control of policy, which he enhanced by careful placement of loyal ministers. He retained his portfolio as Minister of Defense until 1980, and also reorganized the security apparatus into the

National Intelligence Service, which portfolio he kept until 1979. He has relied on the military intelligence function much more than his predecessors (8) and has included military leaders as ad hoc members of many interdepartmental meetings, regardless of whether SADF interests have been involved.(9)

#### DEVELOPMENT OF INDEPENDENT POLICY

Bötha's years as Minister of Defense coincided with the beginning of South Africa's dramatic shift to militarization and national self-sufficiency. The first shock was the 1974 Portuguese coup, which resulted in independence for Portugal's African colonies. The sudden transformation of the friendly bordering countries of Angola and Mozambique into Marxist-ruled states caused great concern in Pretoria. The military response was to actively support rival factions in both countries. In Angola, this led to a SADF cross-border operation that almost reached the capital of Luanda before the combination of Cuban troops, Soviet equipment and possible US pressure resulted in its recall.(10)

The invasion caused concern among not only South African citizens, but also the military. Many senior military leaders were disgusted with what they felt had been a political decision to stop, and there also was open grumbling at the political handling of the war.(11) Some SADF officers felt they had to bear, unfairly, the stigma of defeat in Angola. The experience probably led to the

military's seeking a greater voice in central decision making.

Angola was also the SADF's first experience in conventional war. It demonstrated not only its significant capabilities, but also major weaknesses when matched against Soviet equipment. Perhaps the most important strategic lesson was how quickly an enemy force (Cuban) could be inserted into Africa. This was reemphasized during the Ethiopian/Somali war over the Ogaden, when once again the Soviet Union demonstrated how rapidly it could equip and support African allies.

During this time South Africa also lost many international military contacts. In 1975, Britain abrogated the Simonstown agreement, by which she had wartime basing rights in exchange for supplying the SADF with aircraft, spare parts and electronics required for joint defense of the Cape sea lanes.(12) In 1977, UN Security Council Resolution 418 changed the voluntary UN arms embargo of 1963 into a mandatory sanction. Although the embargo had been circumvented for years, it had required major investment in domestic industry, as the country built toward self-sufficiency in armaments. Today South Africa boasts it is capable of producing 95% of its military requirements.(13) The national defense industry, ARMSCOR, has become one of the ten largest arms manufacturers in the world.

The mid-70s also resurfaced dormant domestic problems. Increasing black protests, such as the Soweto



riots, and growing numbers of insurgent attacks (150 in 1977) caused South Africa to reassess the emphasis on external threats and focus also on internal concerns. The culmination of this probably came with the collapse of the white government in Rhodesia. The numerous external problems, which now included SADF personnel in Namibia as well, and the changing domestic scene, put new pressures on the government. Something was needed to mobilize the white populace behind national policy. The threat became known as "Total Onslaught." The response was to be a "Total Strategy."

#### TOTAL ONSLAUGHT/TOTAL STRATEGY DEFINED

The government determined the major threat to South Africa was Soviet expansionism. This was highlighted by increasing Soviet military aid to surrounding countries, which increased their combined ground forces by 300% between 1977 and 1982.(14) Various Defense White Papers described the onslaught in the language of an overall Marxist, indirect strategy designed to achieve the downfall of South Africa by a combination of international boycotts and embargos, insurgencies and divisive domestic actions. This somewhat imperfect analysis feeds upon historic Afrikaner traditions and racist views. Much of the theory requires military inputs, both in formulation of policy and execution of its strategy.

The architect of Total Strategy was General Magnus Malan, a career soldier with a variety of professional

education and combat experiences. He was the first SADF officer to gain major political influence. He has maintained open contacts with church and economic leaders, and served as chief of the SADF in 1978 before becoming Minister of Defense in 1980.

The strategy was first outlined in the 1977 Defense White Paper and later expanded in Botha's August 1979 speech to the National Party Congress, which laid out a 12 point plan for survival. It is basically a comprehensive plan to utilize "all means available to the state...in order to achieve the national aims within the framework of the specified policies...applicable to all levels and to all functions of the state structure."(15) It is designed to mobilize the society behind the government and, by definition, gives the military a major role in policy making. The 1979 White Paper adds that South Africa is being increasingly threatened and being thrown on its own resources to insure survival.(16) The 1982 White Paper further states that the Soviets are behind all resistance to apartheid through such insurgent organizations as SWAPO and the ANC.(17) Emphasis on Soviet involvement is continually stressed. The 1984 White Paper preface describes an arms buildup in neighboring countries that is out of proportion to their self-defense needs and further predicts that events and circumstances in Southern Africa will continue to exert considerable pressure on South Africa in the military sphere.(18) Whether the South African electorate believes

the emphasis on Soviet involvement to the extent that it is played is questionable.

Total strategy is an umbrella ideology designed to build crucial popular support for the survival of the white state while dominating the surrounding region by military and economic pressure. In reality the policy has the wrong focus, does not solve the nation's major problems, and in fact ignores them. South Africans probably view it in a spectrum ranging from fears of abusive, authoritarian government to an acceptable framework of stability and even possibly peaceful change. Whatever the beliefs, the total strategy continues to shape government policy and SADF thinking.

#### EXTERNAL MILITARY OPERATIONS

The growth of the SADF's influence and power has been most notable in its external operations. In a state of near obsolescence in the early 1960s, its first deployment outside South Africa was a small 1967 border security operation in Rhodesia. By 1969, there were 2,700 South African troops in Rhodesia, (19) and this military support for the white regime continued to grow. By 1973, SADF personnel were active in northern Namibia, and by 1975 they were confident enough for a major cross-border operation into Angola in an abortive attempt to halt the rise of a Marxist government. Between October 1975 and January 1984, the SADF conducted ten military operations into Angola.(20) Between January 1981 and December 1985, the SADF was also

implicated in operations in the Seychelles, Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. These external raids are manifestations of its preemptive tactics and are often compared to those of the Israelis, who are seen as having similar border problems. The raids are part of the wider strategy of regional destabilization designed to continue South Africa's economic, political and military hegemony.

One of the most interesting aspects of these military incursions is the apparent intrigue involved within the South African government. The cabinet was not informed beforehand of the raid on Maseru, Lesotho in 1982, (21) which caused a stir in political circles. Informing the cabinet, however, was not required by South African law. Since then, the intra-government maneuvering has taken a much more sinister aspect with the release of diaries captured from the anti-Marxist RENAMO rebels, by the Mozambique army. These diaries imply South African collusion in training, supplying and negotiating with RENAMO long after the Nkomati accord supposedly stopped all contact between South Africa and the rebels. The diaries also speak of meetings between RENAMO and the South African Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Louis Nels. These meetings took place without the knowledge of Nels' superior, Foreign Minister Pik Botha. Nels is considered far more sympathetic toward the SADF, and the RENAMO rebels, than Botha.

The diaries also contain a letter from SADF Chief, General Constand Viljoen, speaking of difficulties the

soldiers (SADF) are having with their politicians. General Viljoen subsequently admitted that the military had willfully, and without authority, flouted the Nkomati non-aggression pact,(22) but he did not confirm portions of the diaries stating some SADF members did not support government policies.(23)

The question of how independently the SADF operates, and who is knowledgeable about military actions, is one of the more complicated issues concerning SADF political influence. Rather than place specific blame or responsibility, it is more important to realize the complexity of the crosscurrents of power and policy making in South Africa. Obviously the SADF is not operating independently in these actions, and no one has been relieved of command. Select civilian leaders are aware of these operations, but the impetus appears to be coming from the SADF itself.

Such insubordination of military leaders toward civilian government control is foreign to most Western minds. However, the South African military does not operate under rules similar to Western democracies. Based on the Defense Act of 1957, no parliamentary decision is needed to carry out military operations, either internally or in the region of Southern Africa. The Defense Act of 1977 further legalizes SADF deployment outside the republic. Other laws protect military personnel from various legal actions. The latest of these extended a nationwide indemnity from civil

and criminal proceedings for actions taken in carrying out duties in support of emergency regulations.(24) The SADF obviously has wider parameters here and certainly does not require Parliamentary concurrence for military action.

The increased militarization in South Africa is also seen in additional legislative acts that serve to strengthen the SADF. In 1977, compulsory national military service for white males was extended from 12 to 24 months and carried an eight-year active reserve duty commitment. Also, the Civil Defense Act authorized local authorities military power, and an additional program increased the number of high school military cadets to 200,000.

In 1978, national military service was extended to white women on a voluntary basis, and foreigners with permanent South African residence status became eligible for conscription. National servicemen also became protected by law from being sued for debt, and received substantial pay and benefit increases.

In 1982 the active reserve period was extended to 12 years, with up to 720 days of continued active service possible. Additionally, all white males up to age 55 were registered into commando units, and all white males up to age 60 were liable for military training and service. These acts transformed the traditional Afrikaner Commando force from a casual reserve to an integral component of the counterinsurgency effort. All these legislative acts served to mobilize the population, militarize the white society and

more closely integrate the SADF with the civilian population. This does not necessarily mean increased political power for the SADF, but the use of reserve unit call-ups to fulfill combat roles exposes more people to the military structure.

The conscription laws are not universally accepted. There is growing evidence of draft resistance and evasion, with three organized groups, the End Conscription Campaign within South Africa, the Committee on South African War Resistance in London and the South African Military Refugees Aid Fund in the United States, actively supporting draft resisters. Although resistance is growing, there is little evidence it is tied to political motives.(25) Should it become serious, the government would consider it as one more piece of the total onslaught conspiracy.

#### EXPANSION OF THE SADF

Historically, South Africa has never had a tradition of a large standing army. However, the military establishment has grown considerably in the past 25 years. The first decision to enlarge the Permanent Force was made in 1961. Four years later there was a tenfold increase in the number of men undergoing annual military training (2,000-19,800). The following table, which excludes police forces, shows the expansion of the SADF since 1960.(26) The 1984 Defense White Paper shows this trend continuing, with a 5.8% increase in the full-time component during 1981-1983.(27)

SADF Manpower Levels  
(in thousands)

	1960	1967	1974	1977	1979	est 1990
Perm. Force (Full Time)	11.5	13.0	21.5	28.0	40.0	50.0
Nat'l Service (2 yr duty)	10.0	23.0	26.0	27.0	60.0	65.0
Citizen Force (Reserve)	2.0	30.0	120.0	180.0	230.0	455.0
Commandos (Local Vols)	48.5	75.0	90.0	120.0	150.0	420.0
Civilians	6.0	8.0	11.5	12.5	14.0	20.0
Totals	78.0	154.0	269.0	367.5	494.0	1,000
Est. Troops Under Arms	11.5	42.0	47.5	105.0	180.0	200.0

The increase in the size of the part-time component (citizen force and Commando) obviously accounts for a major portion of SADF strength. However, it should be realized that any prolonged use of these forces will cause an impact on the economy, since these reserve members also form the bulk of the skilled white work force.

During the past 35 years, overall defense budgets have also reflected the increase in military growth. The 1960 defense allocation was 6.6% of the government budget and 0.9% of the GNP. It peaked at 19% of the budget and 5.1% of GNP in 1978-79. Figures for later years are scarce, but the 1984 Defense White Paper shows that for 1981, the



budget was 4.6% of GDP. The following table shows comparative data for selected years.(28)

Year	% Budget	% GNP
1960-61	6.6	0.9
1964-65	21.0	--
1969-70	16.8	2.4
1973-74	13.7	2.6
1977-78	19.0	5.1
1982-83	20.0	4.0

What is becoming more critical to the economy is that operating costs are forming an increasingly larger part of the defense budget, 72% in 1982-83 against 56.6% in 1979-80.(29)

#### SADF ROLE IN THE STATE SECURITY COUNCIL

While the SADF has become larger and more aggressive, its major influence in government comes through participation in the State Security Council (SSC). This is one of four cabinet committees and its role includes advice and guidance to the President, and implementation of decisions. Meeting weekly, the SSC is the only regularly functioning governmental body. Its influence transcends other government agencies and committees since, through the total strategy doctrine, almost any issue can be considered to have security concerns. Its decisions ultimately influence and overshadow those of the other cabinet committees.(30) Although the full membership is secret, its announced members include the Minister of Defense and the heads of the National Intelligence Service, the Police and

the SADF. Its secretary, who essentially controls the agenda, has traditionally been a SADF general officer.

The SSC's role is to advise the government on the formulation of national policy and strategy in connection with the security of the Republic, the manner in which this policy must be carried out, and methods of combating any particular threat to the security of the Republic; and to determine an intelligence priority.(31) The national strategic planning process is conducted by the SSC, with its Work Committee and Secretariat, and fifteen inter-departmental committees, (32) each with SADF members. These committees cover such areas as economics, transportation, politics and manpower. The nine regional SSC centers overlay and coincide with SADF area commands.

Of the four cabinet committees in the government, the SSC is the only one established by law with its membership also mandated.(33) Chaired by the President, it has a greater range of issues, greater control over resources, and a more comprehensive structure of supporting committees than the other three. Its meetings are closed, except to members, and its decisions are not subject to confirmation by the full cabinet. In short, it is a secretariat of President Botha, and largely staffed with military personnel and close confidantes of the President. Because of this unique arrangement, the major power of the South African government is no longer with the elected Parliament, but with this small group of technocrats and

military leaders. The SSC is considered to be the government's most powerful policymaking body.

#### CONCLUSIONS

South Africa and its white politics are much more intricate, more unique, more interwoven than current reporting of the black-white issue implies. The Afrikaner nationalism that was systematically developed for the first half of this century emerged in the 1948 National Party's election, but has yet to form into the cohesive, homogeneous electorate often depicted. The constitutional changes, repeal of some apartheid laws, slight reorientation of apartheid policies and total onslaught perceptions are part of a process of searching for the common white political base. More changes are certainly coming. Just as these changes will not satisfy the disenfranchised black or the international community, they will not easily satisfy the majority of whites in South Africa. Changes in political party allegiance will produce a more divided electorate, much as pressures around Israel produce multiple factions that result in coalition governments.

While the electorate becomes more divided and the political parties more factionalized, the one institution most capable of continuing intact is the military. In some ways this could help solve the major national issues, if they are solvable. Although South Africa has used the SADF increasingly, both outside its borders as an arm of national policy and internally to augment the police, it will

ultimately be the military who must realize and decide just what is defensible. The only problem here would be if the SADF was overconfident and looked for a military solution where one was not possible.

Even with a major change in the white government, the structure to implement the total strategy should remain in place. The obvious patterns of militarization in government will continue after Botha because the military must be a necessary actor in the final solutions to Angola, Namibia, border incursions and internal unrest.

The military is also very closely associated with all aspects of the white society. With the growth of SADF manpower, about 70% of white males between 18 and 45 are now in the armed forces. While this figure is not high compared to other militarized states, call-up provisions insure an active exchange of personnel between the civilian and military sectors. The attitude of national servicemen should reflect the range of white political opinion.

Is there a chance of the military taking over the government? After the 1976 Soweto riots (34), and again during the 1978 national elections, when the National Party seemed split, there was speculation of a "DeGaulle option" for the military to take over the government. Some argued that militarization would pose less of a threat to freedom than the combination of domestic violence and external attack.

This is not currently a consideration. It is more

likely South Africa some day will be pushed into a coalition government. The major question then becomes what role various parties could hope to play in a government of only four main cabinet committees, with one, the SSC, dominating the structure.

In a coalition government, what amount of influence is an entrenched military about to give up? This is where one must remember the SADF is not Western, and is not subject to traditional Western civilian control. Its main tradition may well be that of the independent, free-wheeling Boer commando.

The SADF has become a policymaker, but its potential is still an unknown quality. It is by no means a homogeneous body. Even the Permanent Force members of the SADF reflect the political diversity of the white electorate, and many are not completely committed to the total strategy.(35)

Historically the SADF has been a non-political agent of the state, and officially its members are barred from political party membership. All this appears to be changing as South Africa shifts toward more authoritarian rule. Non-partisan does not necessarily mean non-political.

Certainly, SADF members have learned many lessons from their operations in Namibia. Among them are the need to work closely with civilian society, the necessity of incorporating black African soldiers into military units, and the importance of popular allegiance. The new

generation of young officers who have been exposed to both internal and external conflicts have been much more sensitized to the growing problems than the older generation who were dedicated defenders of the original apartheid policies. It is in these lower-grade officers that change is most likely to occur.

Few things are certain about the future of South African politics. Despite the stereotyped image, the nation is a dynamic, pluralistic society with divergent, sometimes incongruous, political interests. The SADF alone cannot solve the social issues that affect the nation. However, military institutions are vital instruments in any country facing radical social change. The SADF will remain a dominant player, representing, defending and possibly modifying the values of the white minority.

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